

# Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide



## Checklist 7a

ORANGE COUNTY • NEW YORK

## Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis Checklist

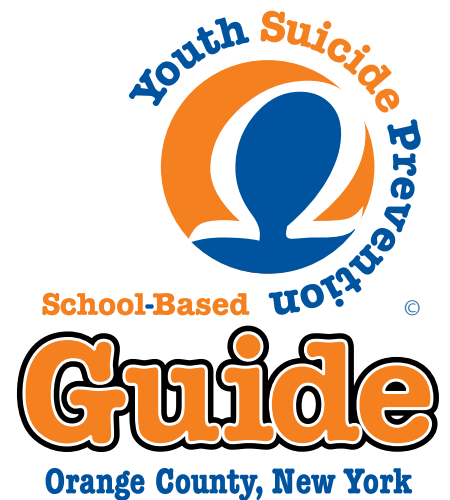
This checklist provides administrators and educators with an efficient inventory of what empirical research and best practice suggests as important considerations when evaluating the status of a school's ability to prepare and respond to a death by suicide. This checklist can be used to quickly evaluate what services and policies your school already has in place (indicated by a "checked box") to respond to a death by suicide or what services and policies your school may be lacking that may need to be implemented or revised (indicated by a "blank box"). This checklist corresponds to Issue Brief 7a, which provides a more in depth and detailed discussion concerning how to prepare for and respond to a death by suicide. The intent of the Issue Brief is to provide research-based and best-practice suggestions for how a school may wish to prepare and respond to a death by suicide. The intention is not to provide definitive declarations for what schools should do when responding to a death by suicide because each school will vary in their ability to implement and maintain suggestions mentioned in the Issue Brief.

## What to DO Following a Suicide:

### Do

- Utilize and follow the school's guidelines for dealing with a suicidal crisis. If the school does not have guidelines please refer to Issue *Brief 7a Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis*.
- Respond to the suicide within 24 hours of the suicide.
- Act in a concerned and empathetic manner.
- Inform all staff members about the suicide and provide a debriefing session where staff may voice their concerns, apprehensions, and any questions they may have (See Issue Brief 7a, page 3, #6 Responding to a Suicidal Crisis: Steps for Schools).
- Inform school board members and school superintendent.

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Select County Departments, Department of Mental Health

## Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis Checklist 7a continued

- ❑ Contact the family to verify the death and if possible, gather the facts surrounding the death as it may impact the school population.
- ❑ Make sure all teachers announce the death of the student to their first class of the day. It is preferable to describe the deceased as “having died by suicide,” rather than as “a suicide,” or having “committed suicide.” The latter two expressions reduce the person to the mode of death, or connote criminal or sinful behavior.
- ❑ Provide counseling sites throughout the school for students.
- ❑ Avoid any glorification or romanticizing of the student or the student’s death.
- ❑ Continually monitor the school’s emotional climate (Has there been an increase in fights or school delinquency following a death by suicide?).
- ❑ Closely monitor Internet connections and collaborate with students to utilize social media effectively (e.g., developing memorial pages) (See Issue Brief 7a, page 4, #17 Responding to a Suicidal Crisis: Steps for Schools).
- ❑ Emphasize that the student who died by suicide was likely struggling with depression or anxiety that may not have been apparent to others.
- ❑ Utilize an established linkage system or community network in order to make referrals to the appropriate services as well to exchange information concerning the appropriate steps for treating those affected by the suicide (including local crisis telephone lines and web-site supports).
  - » Find out if the deceased has any siblings enrolled in other schools and notify the principals of those schools.
- ❑ If appropriate, utilize the Orange-Ulster County-Wide Team for Crisis and Critical Incidence, which should include a diverse group of school professionals, such as the principal, counselor, teacher and possibly the school nurse.
- ❑ Activate procedures for responding to the media (e.g., assign a school liaison to handle all media inquiries in order to avoid sensationalistic stories concerning the suicide). Follow the steps outlined in *Issue Brief 7b Responding to the Media*.
  - » Arrange a meeting for parents/caregivers (See Issue Brief 7a, page 3, #8 Responding to a Suicidal Crisis: Steps for Schools).
  - » Evaluate all activities done following a death by suicide (How did your school respond? What worked and what did not work?).
  - » Acknowledge the traumatic impact the death of a student may have on those who knew the youth and all persons in the school and community and encourage all to seek help as needed.

## What NOT to Do Following a Suicide:

### Do NOT

- ❑ Behave in a quiet and overly conservative manner or in a desperate and frantic manner.
- ❑ Respond to the student’s death differently than any other student death (e.g., plant a tree in order to honor the student).
- ❑ Hold a memorial service for the student at the school.
- ❑ Describe in great detail the suicide (method or place).
- ❑ Dramatize the impact of suicide through descriptions and pictures of grieving relatives, teachers or classmates.
- ❑ Glamorize, romanticize, simplify, or sensationalize the suicide.
- ❑ Underestimate the effect of the traumatic experience on the students, school personnel and community.

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# Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis Checklist 7a continued

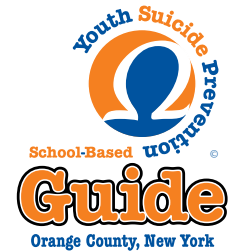
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## Notes

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# Notes

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### Developed by

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